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Guest Comment: Becoming sustainable in policy and practice

by Becky and Al Courchesne

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by Becky and Al Courchesne

Frog Hollow Farm

The word "sustainable" gets a lot of play these days. The looming challenges that climate change poses make sustainability more than just a buzz word. California has been working to address and prepare for these challenges by implementing policies like the landmark climate change law, AB 32. We appreciate the state's leadership on these complicated issues.

At Frog Hollow Farm, we think a lot about sustainability. Most of our decisions are rooted in how to ensure that our business, family, community and natural resources are not only sustained over the long term but actually get stronger and healthier.

Our Brentwood farm started in 1976 on 13 acres of fertile San Joaquin River Delta land. Now we have a thriving 133 acres with hundreds of trees that produce peaches, nectarines, cherries, apricots, apriums, plums, pluots, pears, olives, persimmons, quince, apples and more. Heirloom tomatoes are our newest crop, and we are always planting new things to find out what grows best here.

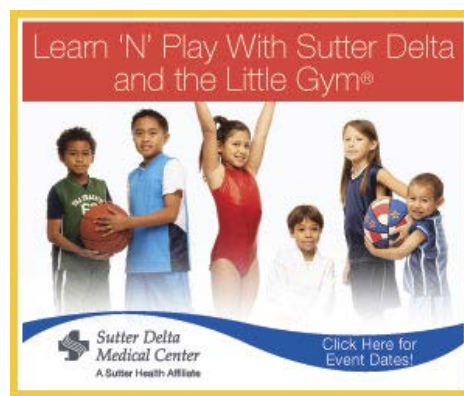
To make maximum use of our harvest and build in safeguards against crop failures, we diversify our crops. We added a commercial kitchen to produce pastries, preserves and dried fruit. In the face of changing weather, pest and water conditions that come with a changing climate, we are counting on this diversity to help us adapt.

We made the transition to organic practices 21 years ago. Instead of fossil fuel-based synthetic fertilizers, we use seaweed, fish, limestone and compost to build soil fertility. With the help of scientific consultants we pay for out of our farm budget, we recently embarked on an exciting new project to improve our compost production.

We now recycle 100 percent of our waste products – orchard prunings, downed branches, old trees and fruit waste – to make high-quality compost that enhances the soil microbiology. Instead of burning our orchard prunings (creating air pollution and emitting carbon into the atmosphere) or piling up our fruit waste to attract pests, we have healthier soils and use very few soil amendments from off our farm.

The Economic and Technology Advancement Advisory Committee to the California Air Resources Board found compost can reduce the need for irrigation, fertilizers and pesticides while also increasing crop yields, stating, "This is a cost-effective way to reduce agricultural GHG emissions while sustaining California's agricultural industry by returning organic nutrients to the soil."

In addition to addressing the climate crisis, farms like ours also provide community benefits such as open space, limiting urban sprawl and the provision of healthy, locally produced food. We are proud to employ 30 year-round workers and 60 during harvest.



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We have implemented sustainable practices throughout our operation; we could do a lot more with some support. And with the right policies and incentives, many more California farms and ranches could make similar contributions and offer multiple benefits to their communities. Frog Hollow Farm will continue to do its part.

Meanwhile, California’s brand-new cap-and-trade program – one component of the larger AB 32 program – will go into effect this year. It will create new opportunities and revenue to support activities that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It gives the state a powerful tool to move sustainability from individual projects such as ours into the mainstream. That sounds like a sustainable future we all can and should support.

Becky and Al Courchesne are the owners of Frog Hollow Farm, a 133-acre California Certified Organic Farm located in Brentwood that has been committed to sustainable practices since 1989.

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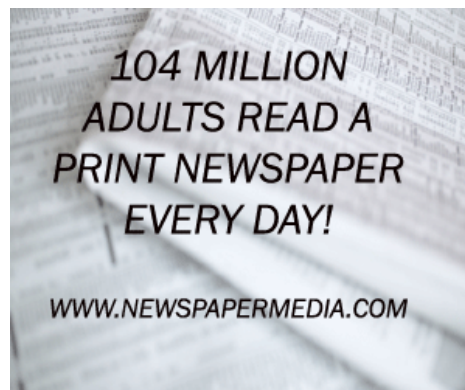
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